

Mary Landrieu

1955–

UNITED STATES SENATOR

DEMOCRAT FROM LOUISIANA

1997–



Congressional Pictorial Directory
109th Congress

MARY LANDRIEU HAS BEEN IMMERSSED IN POLITICS her entire adult life, having come from a New Orleans family which her father once described as “up to its eyeballs in politics.”¹ Her early career as a moderate in the Louisiana legislature and state treasury prepared her for the U.S. Senate, where she sought to be a bridge-builder in an increasingly divided chamber.

Mary Landrieu was born in Arlington, Virginia, on November 23, 1955, the oldest of nine children raised by Moon Landrieu, former Mayor of New Orleans, and Verna Landrieu. After graduating from Ursuline Academy in New Orleans, Mary Landrieu earned a degree in sociology from Louisiana State University in 1977. Two years later, at age 24, she won election to the Louisiana house of representatives, earning the distinction of being the youngest woman to serve in the state legislature. After eight years in the state house, Landrieu became Louisiana state treasurer, a position she held from 1988 to 1996. In 1988 she married Frank Snellings, and the couple adopted two children.

When Senator J. Bennett Johnston announced his retirement in 1996, Landrieu and GOP candidate Woody Jenkins joined the race to fill his seat. The campaign drew national attention when David Duke, a racial supremacist with ties to the Ku Klux Klan, also campaigned for the open seat. Landrieu ran as a moderate in the vein of former Louisiana Democratic Representative Lindy Boggs and embraced much of the William J. Clinton administration’s agenda: welfare reform, a balanced budget, pro-death penalty, and pro-choice. When no candidate won the 50 percent required by Louisiana election law, the top vote getters, Landrieu and Jenkins, faced each other in a runoff.² Landrieu prevailed with a narrow margin of 50.17 percent of the vote, or about 5,800 votes out of 1.7 million cast.³

When she entered the 105th Congress (1997–1999), Senator Landrieu received assignments on three committees: Small Business; Energy and Natural Resources; and Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry. She resigned the Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry seat in the 106th Congress (1999–2001) for a post on Armed Services—becoming the first Democratic woman to serve on that panel, where she remained until 2002.⁴ In the 107th Congress, Landrieu joined the Appropriations Committee. When the Democrats briefly controlled the Senate in the 107th Congress (2001–2003), she chaired two subcommittees: Appropriations’ District of Columbia and Armed Services’ Emerging Threats and Capabilities.

In the Senate, Landrieu maintained to her moderate politics, declaring herself a “New Democrat” centrist. “This isn’t just about casting votes,” she observed. “It’s about shaping what comes before the Senate. Our goal is to convince colleagues to write legislation in ways that won’t automatically set off alarms on the left or the right.”⁵ Her reputation was that of a dealmaker and consensus builder.

During her term on the Agriculture Committee, Senator Landrieu helped assemble a \$6 billion farm bill that established significant drought relief for Louisiana farmers. She also cosponsored the Regulatory Fairness and Openness Act to provide farmers with effective pesticides while seeking to reduce reliance on toxic chemicals that threaten human health. In 1999, she advocated permanent federal funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which benefited local parks and recreation areas in Louisiana. Her first major legislative victory was to secure hundreds of millions of dollars in offshore drilling revenue to be spent annually for 15 years on a host of environmental and conservation support programs.⁶

Two of Senator Landrieu’s signal legislative achievements have been in the fields of defense and education. From her Armed Services seat, Landrieu forged a key compromise that ended a long impasse in the Senate over the National Missile Defense program. Landrieu’s amendment to the legislation outlined a two-pronged approach to the program’s development which included full deployment of the missile system and vigorous diplomatic negotiations with Russia and other nuclear powers to reduce standing nuclear arsenals. In 2001, working across party lines, Senator Landrieu also helped shepherd through the Senate the No Child Left Behind Act, one of the most sweeping educational reform packages in congressional history.⁷ Her amendment targeted funding for school districts with the greatest number of poor students.

In 2002, during her first re-election campaign, Landrieu claimed 46 percent of the vote against nine candidates in the November general election. Louisiana state election law required her to face the runner-up, GOP challenger Suzanne Terrell, in a December runoff, which Senator Landrieu won with 52 percent of the vote.⁸

FOR FURTHER READING

Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress, “Mary L. Landrieu,” <http://bioguide.congress.gov>

Mikulski, Barbara, et al. *Nine and Counting: The Women of the Senate* (New York: Morrow, 2000).

MANUSCRIPT COLLECTION

University of Oklahoma (Norman, OK), The Julian P. Kanter Commercial Archive, Department of Communication. *Video reels*: 21 video reels. Includes 21 commercials used during Landrieu’s unsuccessful 1995 campaign for governor of Louisiana.

NOTES

1 Thomas Fields-Meyer, Macon Morehouse, and Gabrielle Cosgriff, “Born to Run: Sen. Mary Landrieu of Louisiana Keeps Politics a Family Affair,” 20 August 2001, *People*: 93.

2 *Politics in America*, 1998 (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 1997): 605–606; *Almanac of American Politics*, 1998 (Washington, D.C.: National Journal Inc., 1997): 626–627.

3 “Election Statistics, 1920 to Present,” <http://clerk.house.gov/members/electionInfo/elections.html>.

4 “Official Biography of Mary Landrieu” <http://landrieu.senate.gov/about/bio.cfm> (accessed 12 December 2004)

5 Barbara Mikulski et al., *Nine and Counting: The Women of the Senate* (New York: Morrow, 2000): 168; “Mary L. Landrieu,” *Newsweek* 2002, Issue 2 (Gale Group, 2002).

6 *Politics in America*, 2004 (Washington, D.C.: Congressional Quarterly Inc., 2003): 431.

7 *Politics in America*, 2004: 431; “Official Biography of Mary Landrieu.”

8 Mark Leibovich, “The Longest Race: Louisiana’s Mary Landrieu Didn’t Lose on Election Day. But She Didn’t Win, Either,” 26 November 2002, *Washington Post*: C1; Lee Hockstader, “Landrieu Aims to Avoid Making Louisiana History: A GOP Senator Would Be State’s First,” 14 November 2002, *Washington Post*: A3.